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Colliding scale frames in the decision making about intensive agriculture

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In the at times fierce discussions about intensive agriculture people define this issue in many different ways. As a result it is almost impossible to discuss the issue in a neutral way. It is difficult to determine who is responsible for what, who should be involved, who is steering the process and in which directions we should look for solutions. The aim of the essay is to make policymakers, researchers, farmers, and societal organizations aware of the different scale frames (i.e. interpretations of actors involved, in which they situate the issue on a particular scale and level) regarding the intensive agriculture and the consequences for decision making processes.

In our analysis we looked at the scale frames of a municipal alderman, the founder of a local action group, and one of the agricultural entrepreneurs in a municipal decision-making process about a so-called New Mixed Company (NMC). The construction of different scale frames enable the inclusion of some actors and the exclusion of others. The different scale frames make it possible to compose many different arguments, but also result in the blurring of interests. The use of these various different scale frames can be explained as actors speaking different languages, expressed in different frames, resulting in incompatible stories that fit diverging interests. As a result of the use of different scale frames without explication, scale frame mismatches occur. We conclude that scale frame mismatches play an important role in the stagnation of the decision-making process. The appearance of incompatible scale frames result in discussions in which the different parties talk at cross purposes. It is indistinct on which scale and which level the problem should be tackled and as a result who should take the lead. Although the different parties still talk to each other, all groups have the feeling they are not listened to and all feel unrecognized. Amongst the citizens this has resulted in discontent and fierce consternation, resulting in the founding of an action group. The action group and the generated media attention have caused severe delays and obstacles in the decision-making process.

